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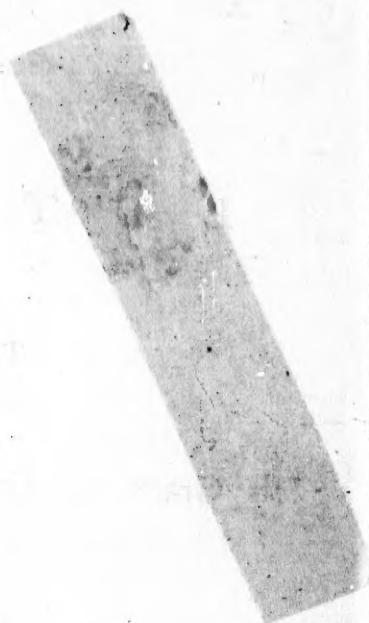
A
L E T T E R
T O

His Grace the Duke of GRAFTON,

O N

The present Situation of Public Affairs.

(Price One Shilling.)



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Errant, ut ventis discordibus acta phaselus.—

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A. E. T. R.

THE OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

WASHINGTON, D. C.

Printed for the Bureau of the Census

1900

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LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

IT is possible for a nation, under a limited monarchy, to be so circumstanced, that even a good man may reconcile it to his patriotism to act uniformly with his party, and, by adhering to it with firmness, deserve a certain degree of applause. The fidelity of party is not indeed to be compared to that perfect love of country, which has no other object but the public good, and of which your Grace may perhaps have seen some instances in history. Yet it is a merit of a subordinate kind, and, considering that the other is now absolutely out of date, should not

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be disregarded. It is also true, my Lord, that a nation may be so circumstanced, that even a bad man, who never had an idea of any interests but his own, must be obliged, if he would act consistently with those interests, to assume the appearance of a more enlarged virtue. He must break through the dependance of party, and exert himself, upon more extensive principles, to preserve the public fortune from a ruin, in which his own would be involved. Your Grace's situation gives you the best opportunity of knowing whether this country may yet be preserved by virtues of a second rate; or whether we have no resource left, but in one general united effort of pure disinterested patriotism, to save the state. Our condition, I hope, is not yet so desperate as to want such a proof of public virtue. But it is time, my Lord, we should know what we have to

trust

trust to. You may conceal the condition of the kingdom from your sovereign ; but you will find it difficult to conceal it from his people, and impossible from yourself. There are many things, indeed, which men know, but which they will not suffer their minds to dwell on with attention. It is the fault of humanity, and particularly of youth, that we turn away our eyes from the necessary consideration of painful objects, and defer the labour of reformation to the dreadful moment, when it is become useless or impracticable. If this be your case, my Lord, a serious representation of the present state of the kingdom, directed immediately to your Grace, may perhaps rouse you from your lethargy, and make you ashamed of it. I shall confine myself to a plain representation of facts, without presuming to offer advice, which certainly would

never be taken, or venturing to form hopes, which probably would be disappointed. In this paper you will find no reflections upon persons, but what are unavoidably connected with things. If your Grace's private advantages can be reconciled to those of the nation, may you enjoy them long. If not, the sacrifice of the public to one man's interest or ambition would, in language at least, be too bad even for modern depravity.

It may seem a paradox to assert, yet I believe it will be found true upon reflection, that the distinction between the parties of Whig and Tory, while it was a real, or at least a profest distinction in principles as well as name, was of service to the kingdom. An able united opposition in parliament, though it may sometimes embarrass a good minister, will

will always have the effect of rousing the activity, and fixing the attention of government ; of perplexing bad measures, and purifying good ones. Opposition is the weight, which keeps the machine together, and makes it go. If it be steady and uniform, government will either be maintained in the same proportion of steadiness, uniformity and strength, or there will be a change of hands. If it be light, weak, and desultory ; if there be no fixed general principles of opposition, experience shews us that government will soon sink down to the same level of weakness, uncertainty and disunion. The generality of men are but ill qualified to judge for themselves, or to direct their own conduct in matter of politics. Their understandings, like the navigation of the ancients, are only fit for coasting voyages, where they may have certain land-marks

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and beacons constantly to guide their course. Such in politics I conceive were those established principles of party, which formerly distinguished Whig and Tory from each other. When they were lost, what consequence could follow, but shipwreck to private faith and public consistency. The faith of party, to which all public virtue had been reduced, when it was no longer directed by principles openly professed and maintained, soon sunk into mere private contract and friendship; a bond too weak for modern morals. Secret stipulations are easily disavowed, and those men will desert their friends without a blush, who would be ashamed to desert both their friends and their principles at once. So much are we governed by words and forms, that when we forget our creed, religion and morals will not be very long remembered. To this confusion

fusion of parties we owe the unsteadiness and distraction, with which public councils have, for some years past, been conducted. Under the Utopian idea of a general coalition, men of all parties, sentiments, opinions, and connections were so mixed and confounded, as to form a strange heterogeneous mass, which it was impossible should hold long together.

Mr. Pitt made it his boast, though very falsely, that, under his administration, all distinction of parties was, for the first time, abolished. I am far from thinking that he would have done a service to his country, if it had been true. But in reality, it was the circumstance of the times produced that general acquiescence with which his measures were received. Public danger and distress will always have the effect of uniting parties,

or

or at least of stifling their animosities. Any great national crisis, whether of foreign invasion or of interior convulsion, will soon oblige all parties to recede from the extremity of their principles, and meet in one point, to provide for their common safety; but in those cases it were to be wished that the union of parties were formed by the cohesion of entire bodies, rather than a confusion of parts. The conduct of the two parties, in bringing about the revolution, is a striking proof that party-spirit is not likely to be carried so far, as to endanger the great general interests of the country. They united in altering the succession to the crown, and in establishing the public security. When that great business was accomplished, each party returned to its colours, and revived that spirit of action and re-action, which constitutes the health
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and vigour of the state. In this light the revolution forms a glorious lesson to future princes not to depend upon an apparent animosity of one party against another, as a means of destroying the liberties of both ; but rather to dread that force, which preserves its tone and activity by a constant exercise upon itself. With respect to the coalition boasted of by Mr. Pitt, it is evident that it could not be owing to his policy or management, but to some other cause ; since we find, in his second administration after the peace, he has not been able to persuade any five people to agree in supporting him, or to form any thing like a strong consistent government. There is, however, too much reason to think that, by bringing together men of different parties, he laid the foundation of a mischief, which has

encreased every day, and now threatens ruin to the kingdom.

It is not my design to enquire which party would have governed beⁿ, or whether the Whig or Tory principle, was best adapted to the British Constitution. I think there was no danger to the establishment from either, while a due opposition to it subsisted. What I assert is, that either party alone would have given us a government; since both have been confounded, we have had no government. The idea of forming an administration upon the broad foundation of comprehending all parties, is pleasing enough in theory, and sounds well in declamation, but has never yet been attempted in this country with success. As things are now constituted, a government by party, however

ever imperfect and partial it may seem in speculation, is the only one likely to act with strength and consistency, and the only one that suits the temper and circumstances of this country. To complain, that an uniform opposition retards and embarrasses the measures of government, is vain and idle. A Minister, who undertakes, should be equal to the task with all its difficulties; and it is so easy for him, considering the influence and resources of the Crown to maintain a parliamentary strength sufficient for any defensible purposes, that not to have it will of itself convict him of extraordinary weakness and mismanagement. There never was an opposition supported by such abilities, or maintained with so much perseverance, as that which Sir Robert Walpole met with during the whole of his administration. Yet your Grace knows how

long it was ineffectual, and that probably it would never have succeeded, if he had not given advantages against himself, by a series of measures contradictory to the spirit and temper, if not to the real interests of the people.

These observations, my Lord, will not appear useless, if they lead, as I apprehend they do, to a knowledge of the true causes of our present situation. Whether they lead to a remedy of it, will be matter for your Grace's future consideration. From this original mistake that an administration, to be firm and permanent, should comprehend different parties, all our present divisions, all the scandalous changes, which have been made in the King's servants, and confusion of broken, distracted measures, may without difficulty be traced.

In stating to the public some of the
most

most alarming circumstances of our situation, an attempt to conceal or soften would be very difficult, and perhaps not very advisable ; to exaggerate is impossible. The same things have probably been said or thought by others ; but, if we may judge by the effect, I shall repeat nothing that has yet been sufficiently considered. The most important phenomena, in politics as well as nature, are neglected because they are constantly before us, and seem to be little observed for the very reason, which makes them most worthy of observation.

The national debt presents itself as the first great object of national distress. To complain of the enormous amount of it, or to enter into a deduction of all the fatal consequences attending it, would now be to little purpose. But it may be useful,

ful, and the public has a right to complaint of the inattention of government to this great article. The conduct of your immediate predecessors in office, will not justify your Grace nor the board, at which you preside. The nation will not long remain satisfied with seeing the conduct of the revenue repeatedly offered and refused, and at last committed to a rate of abilities barely equal to the task of getting through the supplies from year to year. Be assured, my Lord, the public will not long be contented with this narrow system of temporary expedients and poor contracted measures, which another year must entirely exhaust. The state of the national debt, and of trade, upon which the national revenue depends, calls loudly for the care of a man of superior abilities ; of capacity to form, and resolution to execute, some great comprehensive plan for the relief

lief of both ; who will not content himself
 with a languid official execution of his
 duty, but apply to this important service,
 with the steadiness of a Minister, convin-
 ced by real knowledge that he is doing
 right, and with the zeal of a man passio-
 nate for his purpose. The ordinary rou-
 tine of office is not made for the present
 conjuncture ; much less will it bear the
 doubts and difficulties of cautious inexperience.
 It calls for a Minister, who has ex-
 perience enough of business not to be re-
 tarder or perplexed by forms, and whose
 mind is equal to the comprehension of se-
 veral important objects at once. A real
 effectual œconomy, and a regard to the
 burthens with which commerce is oppres-
 sed, will be no less his care than the an-
 nual reduction of a part of the debt.
 These objects will be constantly before
 him in an united view ; and when he
 gains

gains in one way, it will never be at the expence of losing in another. If there be a man in this country possessed of such qualifications, it is unnecessary for me to name him. Either he does not exist, or there can be no doubt who he is.

Next to the debt, the weight of which presses immediately upon this island, where the lifeblood of the empire stands collected, I conceive that the state of the colonies demands the immediate and earnest attention of government, of the legislature, and of the people. There was a time when a moderate degree of care and firmness might have prevented the American torrent from bursting its banks. By what arts of policy, or by what efforts of vigour it can now be brought back to and confined within its natural channel, is more than a private man of my level should

should presume to point out. This at least is certain that, while we have been disputing about the right, we have unwarily given up the fact. Every good man will wish that the differences between Great Britain and her colonies may be compromised with that amity and affection by which they ought to be bound to each other ; but let it be remembered that no compact between man and man, or between nation and nation, can have solidity or permanence, if it be founded entirely on demands on one side, and concessions on the other. Either it will soon be broken, or it will be attended with an absolute transition of power. It is not hazarding much to assert, that every delay in bringing the question between this country and the colonies, to an equitable and certain decision, serves only to make the

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evil worse, and the final remedy more difficult to Great Britain. I will not object such delay to the present ministry, because I know their weakness; and I need hardly ask your Grace, whether you can seriously think that, without some extraordinary talents as well as resolution at the head of affairs, without unanimity in the council, without a determined support from the legislature, and a general concurrence of the whole people (which none but a firm ministry can expect) this great question is likely to be fairly discussed, or decided with honour and security to this country. You will not flatter us with the hopes even of an attempt of this kind from the present administration. We know that your council is made up of views and interests too different to agree upon a point of this importance; and, if they were
 agreed

agreed, where are the abilities, where is the resolution equal to the task?

If it were possible for us to be insensible of a ruinous debt, or of the alarming state and temper of the colonies, there are other evils, which we cannot shut our eyes to, because they come immediately home to our doors. A selfish or an indolent man may flatter himself that public credit will, at all events, last his time, and that the contest with America will be an inheritance bequeathed to posterity. But when domestic government is universally relaxed, when the laws have lost their force, and riot little short of rebellion shall threaten his house, his fortune, and his life, he cannot be blind to his danger, nor will he think that government entitled to his

submission, which leaves him without protection. This too, my Lord, is the effect of confused distracted councils. Had his Majesty's servants been originally agreed among themselves, in what manner to act towards Mr. Wilkes on his arrival from France, those odious scenes of violence and outrage on one side, and of military execution on the other, to which we have all been witnesses, would probably have never existed. I will not assert, tho' there is strong reason to suspect, that many of these disorders have been secretly fomented by one part of the administration, merely with a view of perplexing the other.

The mention of military execution naturally leads me to take notice of the
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present condition of our standing army. The public provides annually, in time of peace, for the establishment of near thirty four thousand effective men for the service of Great Britain, and of the garrisons and plantations abroad. The expence of this establishment, when added to that of half pay to officers reduced, and to all the necessary and unnecessary contingencies of such an army, will appear enormous. I will not attempt to revive those general arguments against standing armies, which our ancestors made use of in vain. Like old proverbs, they contain truths, which it is unfashionable to believe, until they are confirmed by one experiment, which will decide the question in a summary way for ever. But I may be permitted to ask

ask your Grace whether this great expence is so managed and applied, as even to answer the purposes intended by parliament; or, in other words, whether your army, either in numbers or discipline, is such as it ought to be, and such as the public has a right to expect it should be. Except a few regiments in this island, whose colonels, military thro' whim, are perhaps zealous for the honour of their particular corps, is your army on the whole either compleat in numbers or in such a state of discipline, as to be fit to take the field, if any unforeseen emergency should require it. Your Grace might know, if you thought proper to enquire, that the army here, in Ireland, and in the plantations, not only wants some thousands to compleat, but is,

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for the most part, totally unfit for service. If I were to give way to all the reflections, which naturally arise at sight of such a gross neglect and scandalous abuse, they would perhaps lead me too far into the consideration of personal and particular circumstances. I shall content myself therefore with observing in general, that whoever formed a late plan of augmentation ought to have compleated the old establishment before he endeavoured to augment it;---that every purpose of regimental uniformity might have been answered without an augmentation of three thousand men ;---that to encrease the military standing force of this country, in time of peace, under any pretence, must always be a suspicious, and some time or other a fatal measure, and
that

that it matters not whether the military power of the crown be increased in Ireland or in Great Britain ;---in conclusion, that we are highly indebted to the Irish house of commons, which had spirit enough to make a stand, in the first instance, against a measure, which probably would have received but little opposition here.

The high price at which provisions have been held, and are too likely to continue, is a grievance which affects not only the poorer part, but in its consequences the whole body of the nation, and government immediately. But since I determined to state nothing in this paper but abuses or distresses, which ministerial negligence or weakness has created, and
which

which a different system of measures might correct, I shall not dwell much upon a disease which I doubt, whether any administration can cure. In the last session of parliament, Mr. Conway made an acknowledgment of this kind to the House of Commons, and was deservedly censured for advising the crown to recommend an object to the consideration of parliament, which he himself confessed was beyond their reach. From the boundless extravagance and luxury which prevails through every rank of people, we seem unanimously agreed that the game is desperate, and that it is our interest to enjoy life as long, and to ruin ourselves as fast as we can, as if some pestilence had entered the country, which no man could escape. This, my Lord, is an evil too in-

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veterate and univerfal for ministerial prudence to remedy, and I fear even for your Grace's example to correct.

The laft point, upon which I fhall venture to touch but lightly, is formidable enough to alarm the dulleft and moft thoughtlefs mind. I mean the poffibility of a war. Such an event you well know, my Lord, would fhake your loofe disjointed adminiftration to pieces, and perhaps give us a folid united government. Whether we fhould fubmit to fee our natural enemy making an acquifition more valuable than all the triumphs of a fuccefsful war; or whether we fhall have peace until France has recovered ftrength and fpirits enough to attack us directly, are queftions of ftate not to be refolved,

nor

nor properly to be discussed but in the cabinet. By whatever means it has happened that things are reduced to a condition, wherein it is hardly possible for you to take a right step, this at least is not doubtful, that neither place, nor retirement, nor even his insignificance will protect a minister, under whose administration it shall appear that this country could neither have peace with honour, nor make war with advantage.

If these propositions and facts should appear to be fairly advanced and truly stated, and if it were possible for the whole to be thus represented to a great prince qualified to judge well, and anxious to do right, in what manner may it be imagined he would reason upon them? With-

out any great breach of probability I think he would express something like the following sentiments.

“ I see plainly that I was mistaken in
“ my first principle of government, and
“ that by endeavouring to reconcile and
“ unite opposite parties, I have done no-
“ thing but introduce discord and distrac-
“ tion into my councils. This mistake
“ has been the source of all that weak-
“ nefs, inconsistency and change of mi-
“ nisters, which has dishonoured my go-
“ vernment, and made my crown a bur-
“ then to me. Experience, beyond all
“ speculation, has convinced me that it
“ is impossible to govern this country but
“ by a single party. I am determined,
“ therefore, to commit my affairs for the
“ future

“ future to that party, which, on mature
 “ deliberation, shall appear strongest in
 “ abilities, numbers, and parliamentary
 “ interests. My choice shall be made with
 “ caution, but I will adhere to it firmly;
 “ or, if I should be compelled to change
 “ my servants, the change shall be entire,
 “ for never more will I submit to patch
 “ an administration. Which ever way I
 “ turn my eyes, the necessity of forming
 “ once for all a new, a compact, and an
 “ able administration, appears to me in
 “ the strongest light. The state of the
 “ finances calls for a man of superior ta-
 “ talents;—that of the colonies requires
 “ a man of unshaken resolution. I must
 “ have union, wisdom, and firmness in
 “ my own servants, before I can hope
 “ to restore vigour to my government,
 “ or reverence to the laws. My army
 must

" must no longer be sacrificed to the anti-
" motives of a Commander in Chief, and
" of a Secretary at war, or to the negli-
" gence of both.

" When these alterations are made, if
" it should then please God to make a
" war unavoidable, the nation will either
" be prepared for it, or I shall have the
" consolation of knowing that I have
" done my duty to my people."

F I N I S.

